## JATRAN Handilift Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes November 14, 2012

The meeting was held in the first floor conference room of the Hood Building, 200 South President Street. Attending today's meeting were: Ms. Lee Cole (ADA Council Chairperson); Dr. Scott Crawford (Handilift Committee Chairperson); Ms. Traci Brent (Jackson Transit Services/ADA Transportation Accessibility Coordinator; Mr. Dewayne Cheatham (JATRAN's Head of Operations); Ms. Karen Robinson (JATRAN Handilift Dispatcher); Mr. Nathaniel Robinson (JATRAN Maintenance Director); Ms. Ollie Lester (Addie McBryde Rehab Center for the Blind); Mr. Jason Bunch; Mr. Fred Myers; Mr. Willie Cook; Attorney Kay Hardage (DRMS); Ms. Jerri Walton; Ms. Jean McKinney; Leesha Heard (JATRAN Risk Manager); Swannie Wilson (JATRAN Handilift Coordinator); Carl Allen (Deputy Director of Planning and Development); Mr. Wilbert Bingley; and Mr. Sidney Stevenson.

The meeting convened at 1:20pm, because of a prior meeting in the room.

## **Approval of Minutes:**

After introductions, Ms. Robinson read the minutes for the September 19<sup>th</sup> Handilift meeting. After one wording correction proposed by Ms. Brent, the revised minutes were approved unanimously.

## **Old Business:**

- I. Nominations for Handilift Advisory Committee Officers The chair pointed out that he erred by failing to raise this issue at the last meeting, so opened the floor for nominations. There were several questions from the committee members regarding the particulars of the bylaws. Crawford did not have the bylaws at the meeting but said he would email them to the committee. Reverend Gleese suggested the committee table the issue so that members would have time to consider nominations. The consensus was that there would be nominations and election at the January 16<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- II. The chair raised a suggestion by JATRAN Consent Decree monitor, Russell Thatcher, that the committee consider a name change to "ADA Transportation Committee", since the committee also addresses accessibility of the fixed route service as well as Handilift. Ms. Cole and Reverend Gleese raised concerns that this might make it difficult to distinguish from the title of the ADA Advisory Council, and that there had been some confusion getting the minutes labeled appropriately on the website. Ms. Lester asked if it was appropriate to discuss ADA transportation matters that affected use of the fixed route service in this context. The chair explained that this committee has traditionally dealt with all issues relevant to the accessibility of JATRAN for people with disabilities. Ms. Lester moved that the committee leave its name as is, and Ms. Walton seconded. The motion to retain the current name: "JATRAN HANDILIFT ADVISORY COMMITTEE" passed unanimously.

III. The chair mentioned that there had been a consultation on board one of the new Handilift buses last month, immediately following the ADA Advisory Council and the question was asked whether the four securement locations in the back was deemed sufficient, or if members felt the flexible fold-away seating was preferable. The chair stated his recollection that the consensus was that the fold-away seating afforded more flexibility in placement of wheelchair users on the bus. Rev. Gleese also recalled that recommendation. Mrs. Brent said that the decision would be based in part on the cost of the buses and whether that seating arrangement was available. Mr. Allen added that he understood that there might be some kind of limitation on state contracts. Crawford said he has spoken with Shirley Wilson, Director of MDOT Public Transit, and she indicated there was no such restriction through her office (i.e., the city could order paratransit buses with any interior configuration deemed appropriate).

## **New Business:**

- Reverend Gleese asked that Mr. Bingley be allowed to speak. Mr. Bingley related IV. an incident that occurred on July 30<sup>th</sup> of this year while riding the Route #4 Belhaven fixed route bus. He said the operator deployed the ramp to let him off in the parking lot of the Shell station on Fortification Street near Jefferson Street. As Mr. Bingley related it, the ramp was too steep and his wheelchair foot-rest caught on the ground at the bottom of the ramp and his chair flipped forward. Because he had a lap belt, he fell forward with the chair onto the concrete and ended up with the chair on top of him. People at the Shell station reportedly helped him off the ground and right the chair. Mr. Bingley reported that before a person arrived from JATRAN to take pictures, the operator moved the bus and redeployed the ramp in a less steep configuration. Mr. Bingley said he spoke with someone at JATRAN who filed an incident report. Eventually, he says he got a letter from the Traveler's insurance company denying any claim because there had been no negligence. Mr. Bingley said he strongly disagrees with that conclusion, and does not know why filing an incident report did not in itself constitute a complaint. Mr. Cheatham explained that an incident report and a rider complaint are two distinct entities. Crawford stated that he thought that a mishap of this magnitude should automatically constitute a complaint ("Isn't this common sense?"). JATRAN staff disagreed. Mr. Bingley concluded that as a result of this incident, he is "paranoid of getting off the ramp now", and has reduced his use of the fixed route buses.
  - Ms. Cole expressed the opinion that it would have been "good public relations" for someone at JATRAN to follow-up with Mr. Bingley.
- V. Next, Mr. Stevenson, the father of a woman with cerebral palsy that rides Handilift asked to speak. He related that he had been trying to reach Mr. Letman for two months about an incident in which his daughter fell out of her manual wheelchair while riding in the back of a Handilift vehicle. This has reportedly happened more than once. He was called to assist his daughter back into the

chair. It is unclear how she fell and there is an ongoing investigation into the matter. Somehow during the incident, one of the wheels of her chair was bent, and Mr. Stevenson asked why JATRAN has not offered to fix the chair. Mr. Stevenson said he was subsequently told that his daughter may not ride Handilift in the future without a personal care attendant. JATRAN personnel at the meeting said that they could not comment on an ongoing investigation.

- VI. Crawford said he received complaints and made at least one himself about bus operators not kneeling the buses when older adults and people with obvious disabilities boarded/alighted. Mr. Letman said that there is no law requiring kneeling buses 100% of the time. Crawford agreed, adding that as long as operators kneel the buses for older adults and people with disabilities, there would be no complaints from him.
- VII. Crawford asked if anyone from JATRAN had spoken with El-Dorado to see if something was fundamentally wrong with the kneeling systems of those particular buses. JATRAN's Chief of Maintenance Nathaniel Robinson said that he had talked to someone from El-Dorado, and that the conclusion was that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the buses themselves, but that the suspension/kneeling system requires a few minutes to recover.
- VIII. Crawford asked if there was any flexibility in the way JATRAN records rider complaints. There is a form available online, and a phone line, but Crawford said phone calls from the side of the road were difficult and painful for him (as his vocal cords are paralyzed), and asked if it was acceptable to email particulars of a complaint as long as they went to Ms. Brent, JATRAN's ADA Accessibility Coordinator. Reverend Gleese stated that the ADA calls for "reasonable accommodation" in such situations. Mr. Allen also suggested a call or email to the "311" City Help Line is another way to convey a complaint, adding that it has strict time limits on responses.
- IX. Finally, Crawford asked Mr. Allen and Ms. Brent if there were any proactive approach to replace some of the aging Gillig buses, adding that he waited more than an hour for a Route #1 bus last week because, he was told, that both of the Route #1 Gilligs had broken down. Ms. Brent said that the buses were expected to last twelve years, but Crawford asked if they were getting near the 500,000 mile limit. Ms. Brent said that the city plans on purchasing two new fixed route buses.

The meeting was adjourned at about 2:50pm. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

These Minutes were written by committee chairperson, Scott M. Crawford, Ph.D. and approved at the January 16, 2013, meeting of the Committee.